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Academic book reviews in English and Spanish: critical comments and rhetorical structure

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Abstract

Given the increasing pressure felt by many Spanish scholars to publish in English, writing academic book reviews for an international audience might become a possible strategy to make their names more visible. However, Spanish writers of book reviews of literature might have initial problems with publishing academic book reviews in Anglo-American journals since they have a suspicious tendency to almost exclusively praise the book. This total lack of unbiased objective assessment might have the effect of undermining the reliability and credibility of the reviewer and of the book's worth, thus resulting in the rejection of the text. In an attempt to further understand the conventions of this genre cross-culturally, the major purpose of the present chapter is to compare how critical attitude towards the book under review is measured out throughout the rhetorical structure of academic book reviews to achieve the genre's main communicative purpose in each case. The study focuses on two comparable corpora of literary book reviews of literature, 20 in English and 20 in Spanish (the *LIBRES* corpus). It analyses the distribution of positive and negative critical comments across the major moves in the texts rhetorical structure. The results show slightly different rhetorical preferences as to how to construe this genre. While both Anglo-American and peninsular Spanish reviewers tend to open and close their book reviews with praise and concentrate their evaluations in the middle and closing sections of their texts, the critical nature of the latter sections is much more balanced in the Anglo-American academic book reviews. These results are discussed in the light of information provided by relevant informants through e-mail interviews, suggesting that the differences might be motivated by a slight different conception of the purpose of the genre, the different size of the academic communities and slightly different editorial practices.

Keywords:

EAP, academic book reviews, academic writing, evaluation, critical comments, rhetorical structure, scholarly communication, cross-cultural, intercultural, contrastive rhetoric, English, Spanish, editorial practices, reviewing, writer-reader relationship